



Tips for Working with Media—Community Tool Kit

Generating media coverage

Background work

Before communicating with reporters, you will want to identify your goals (what do you want to accomplish by reaching out to media?) and develop **Key Messages** (what are your main points?). Next, you will want to decide what type of communication you want to send. Here are some classic ways to get your messages in print or on the airwaves:

- An **Op-Ed** is a 500-800 word editorial that gives an opinion on a timely topic. It is usually submitted to the Editorial Board Editor.
- A **Letter-to-the-Editor** is a 200-300 word letter that responds to a recent article or editorial.
- A **Media Advisory** is often used to invite media to attend an event.
- A **Media Release** is typically used when making an announcement.
- A **Public Service Announcement** is a pre-written or pre-packaged “spot” that is typically 30 or 60 seconds in length.

Crafting your communication

Once you’ve decided which communication to use, begin a draft using your **Key Messages**. Remember to add time to your schedule for revisions and approvals. This is also when you should identify your spokespeople. Who will be signing the **Op-Ed** or **Letter-to-the-Editor**? Which local health officials, local business owners, or real people will be quoted in your media release and ultimately in the news? Remember to provide spokespeople with background materials.

Sending your message to media

When sending something out to media, you should remember these tips:

- Create or update your **Media Contact List**. Should a columnist, a health editor, or the news assignment desk receive your message? Remember to keep it current as reporters change jobs frequently. When sending to two people, make sure the other reporter or editor knows you are sending it to their colleague.

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- Confirm that the appropriate people have signed off and it has gone through a thorough proofing process. Also, share the document(s) and **Key Messages** with your staff so everyone is on the same page.
- Place contact information at the top of the document. Include a backup contact if you need to. Make sure the people who are listed will be readily available.
- Depending on how your contact would like to receive it, send via e-mail, snail mail, or fax.
- Reporters prefer to receive information and phone calls between 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.
- Follow-up by phone. Find out if they have any questions or would like to interview a spokesperson.

Responding to media

When responding to a reporter's request for facts, a quote, or interview, you should remember these tips:

- You can always ask for time to prepare. Saying, "I want to make sure I give you accurate information," will give you an opportunity to double check your stats, prep your spokesperson, etc.
- Reporters' jobs are deadline-driven. Always ask for their deadline so that you can respond in a timely manner.
- If you don't know the answer, say that you don't know and that you will get back to them.

Gathering coverage

Clip your news articles and get copies of your broadcast coverage. These will be useful for mailings to political or business leaders in your community.